

TESTIMONY OF RICHARD L. SCHWAB PH.D.
DEAN EMERITUS, PROFESSOR OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERIM DIRECTOR OF THE
COMMFACT SCHOOLS ALLIANCE
NEAG SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
ON
FUNDING FOR COMMFACT SCHOOLS
FEBRUARY 19, 2010

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Richard Schwab and I am Dean Emeritus and Professor of Educational Leadership at the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. I am currently serving as the Interim Director of the CommPACT Schools Alliance. The Neag School has a long and distinguished history of working with the State of Connecticut to improve our K-12 public schools. While we are proud of our past engagement, we share the frustration everyone feels with the growing achievement gap in Connecticut. We are especially concerned that there is limited support to help schools implement reform that reflects research-based practices within existing urban school districts.

As a result of our shared frustration we began conversations with the state's teacher unions and school administrators' organizations to explore ways to collaborate in urban school improvement. As one of the top 20 public and private schools of education in the nation we felt it was critical to join hands with these major stakeholders to reform schools from within. From these discussions, the Neag School, the Connecticut Education Association, the Connecticut Federation of Teachers, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, the Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents, and Connecticut Federation of School Administrators formed a partnership – the first of its kind in the state and the nation -- to improve urban schools, and established the CommPACT (**COMM**unity, **P**arents, **A**dministrators, **C**hildren, **T**eachers) School Alliance. In 2009 the State of Connecticut joined our collaborative effort by providing \$475,000 for FY 2009 and \$450,000 for 2010. We have worked hard since that time to expand our partnership to eight public schools in Connecticut and have raised more than two times the state's investment in outside funds to support CommPACT Schools.

The CommPACT Schools Initiative is unique because it involves all of the aforementioned major educational stakeholders and has the full support of the Commissioners of Higher Education and State Department of Education. There are many indicators of the uniqueness of this effort. Last year the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) selected the CommPACT project as a national model for higher education's engagement in K-12 school reform. NCATE is the national accreditation agency for teacher education with over 700 member institutions. In November of 2009, I had the honor of personally being invited to meet with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, to brief him on the CommPACT reform model. As a result of that and other meetings Secretary Duncan held with national leaders from the NEA, AFT, superintendents, and principals' associations, language in various federal grant guidelines were adjusted to accommodate within district reform efforts like the CommPACT Schools Project. Consequently, Connecticut's *Race to the Top* federal grant

instructional and professional development goals. Core supports are designed to help put in place robust structures that accelerate student achievement.

2. **CUSTOMIZED SUPPORT** - are tailored to the specific needs of each school as determined by the school community in consultation with the Neag School. The Neag School facilitates professional development and coaching in leadership, governance, instructional practice and content areas. Customized supports are designed to concentrate on improving teaching and student learning at the classroom, grade, or school level. The framework for customized supports is based on the unique strengths and needs of each individual school community.
3. **RECIPROCAL SUPPORT** - are contributions that individual schools give back to the network for the benefit of other participating schools. These supports emerge from the strengths, successes, and experiences of each network school and may be demonstrated in a variety of forms including: interschool visits and walkthroughs, workshops designed by a team of teachers, peer coaching, contributing to documentation of network "lessons learned," providing technical assistance, and holding network-wide conferences.

By all measures the CommPACT schools have made tremendous progress in the year and half they have been operating. The following are a few of the examples of this progress:

1. Each school has a Comprehensive School Level Improvement Plan with ownership by parents, teachers, community members and administrators.
 - a. All sites created school level leadership teams which included parents, teachers, administrators and community members. Led by UConn site facilitators, schools created school improvement plans based upon data and research-based practices. All decision making is shared, which leads to a shared vision, mission and ownership, and in turn, enhances the teaching and learning experience for all of those involved. Teachers and building level leaders are empowered to make decisions and held accountable for those decisions.
 - b. Site based teacher-led teams have studied research based practices in literacy, numeracy and social/behavioral and are implementing concrete changes to improve schools.
2. Each school has implemented a comprehensive assessment/evaluation system to ensure accountability.
 - a. Research teams from UConn designed/implemented comprehensive evaluation systems to monitor student growth academically, behaviorally and socially. First year findings have been shared with schools and have informed strategic planning.

The Future. Funding levels from the State of Connecticut for year 2010 are slated for \$450,000. This reduction has seriously hurt the speed of reform as money allocated for site based professional development and curricular change has been eliminated. If funding continues at the \$450,000 level we will need to eliminate at least one full time School Facilitator and stop serving at least two of the eight schools. If Governor Rell's recent proposal to fully eliminate funding occurs, we will be forced to end the CommPACT School program just as it is beginning to pay off in eight of most challenged schools directly resulting in the following:

1. Two years of planning and implementation efforts will be wasted just when the effort is about to yield results.
2. Urban educators who have worked tirelessly to make major changes to help their students will have the rug pulled out from under them once again.
3. External funds that were raised on the promise of matching state investments will have to be returned.
4. Outstanding new demonstration sites for offering clinical experiences for future urban teachers and administrators will be lost.
5. The nation's first collaborative effort among a major research university and all major stakeholders to address one of the most challenging problems facing our nation-- closing the steadily increasing achievement gap-- will end just when partners are forging new constructive working relationships.
6. One of the most cost effective school reform programs in the country will be lost. The current program serves 4,198 students, (over 90% of whom are Title 1 and from minority backgrounds) and 418 teachers. In addition, CommPACT serves all students and does not use selective factors or lotteries to determine which students have access to the program. Based upon the projected \$450,000 allocation for 2010, the State of Connecticut contribution on a per pupil basis is \$107. This is considerably less than state costs for other state supported educational reform efforts.

As the legislature has seen the necessity to fund other reform models and their expansion, we hope you see the cost effectiveness and wisdom to do the same for our most challenged urban public schools. Thank you.